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Seminar Series on Ideas, Identities and Decisional Processes that Affect Security

Heather Raffo

"The Sounds of Desire"

Thursday, January 27, 2011

7:30 p.m.

Thurber Theater

1849 Cannon Drive, Columbus, OH 43210

Written and performed by Guest Artist Heather Raffo
with live music performed by Amir ElSaffar

Heather Raffo, author and actress of the award winning one woman show *9 Parts of Desire*, teams up with Amir ElSaffar, accomplished jazz trumpeter and Iraqi santoor player, for a dramatic evening of spoken word and melodic solos. Using characters from the acclaimed one-woman show like slam poetry, together they present a concert of urban and classical sounds that spring from both their Iraqi and American roots.

Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire*, described by *The New Yorker* as "an example of how art can remake the world," details the lives of nine ordinary and extraordinary Iraqi women. Both mythical and contemporary, the women's words weave in and out of the ancient quarter tone scales of Amir's classical santoor and the improvisational heart of jazz, resulting in a melody decidedly Iraqi and American.

This is the first full collaboration of the two artists. Amir and Heather met soon after the Iraq war began in 2003. Both children born of Iraqi and American parents, they naturally had a lot in common. Raised in the mid-west, both became artists with strong American influences. Yet the war would prove to be a pivotal point in their work. Both have large extended families still living in Baghdad, and their recent work reflects a vision of translating an Iraqi cultural experience for an American ear.



Heather Raffo
Actress and author of
9 Parts of Desire

Amir has performed extensively as a Jazz and Classical trumpeter with esteemed artists such as Cecil Taylor, Vijay Iyer, and Daniel Barenboim. After a trip to Iraq in 2002, his focus shifted to the Iraqi santoor, a hammered dulcimer instrument, and the traditional music of Iraq, known as the Maqam. He has now mastered a significant portion of the Maqam repertoire, and leads Safaafir, which is the only ensemble in the US performing the Iraqi Maqam. His newest work, called *Two Rivers*, brings Maqam melodic structures into a modern Jazz context.

Heather's artistic career began as an actress. She has performed off Broadway, off West End, in regional theater and in film. In early 2001 she began work on *9 Parts of Desire*. Heavily inspired by an earlier trip to see her family in Baghdad, research for *9 Parts of Desire* took her deep into the Iraqi community both in and outside Iraq.

9 Parts of Desire was first seen in Edinburgh at the Traverse Theater and later at the Bush Theater in London's Off West End where critics hailed it one of the five best plays in London. It later was developed in conjunction with the Public Theater's New Work Now Festival and opened Off Broadway at the Manhattan Ensemble Theater where it ran for nine sold-out months before beginning extended runs around the United States and internationally.

Co-sponsored by the [Department of Theatre](#)

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